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Vigilante action is unIslamic

THIS being Ramadan, the Muslims' fasting month, some Islamic activists in Indonesia have taken it upon themselves to protect the sanctity of the month by attacking restaurants and nightspots to force their managements to close the business. But their actions run counter to the teaching of moderation in Islam.

One such group was the Fron Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders Front). Like many other groups, it justified its actions using the *hadith* (saying) from Prophet Muhammad: "Anyone among you sees disobedience to God (*munkar*), should change it with his hand. If he is not able to, then with his tongue. If he is not able to, then change it in his heart. That is the weakest of faith."

Alas, however, their understanding of this *hadith* is wrong. What they did is actually prohibited in Islam. While it is true that Islam en-

courages Muslims to act against *munkar* "with the hand", Islamic ulama would interpret "hand" to denote the authority of the *Ulil Amri* (the authorities).

Every type of *munkar* has its own *Ulil Amri* who can legitimately exercise its authority to change it "with the hand". For example, for acts of *munkar* in a family, the *Ulil Amri* are the father and the mother; those who are not *Ulil Amri* in that family do not have the authority to prevent *munkar* with the "hand". At school, the *Ulil Amri* is the headmaster.

Different types of *Ulil Amri* facing different situations have different levels of authority in preventing *munkar* "with the hand". For example, although the *Ulil Amri* of a family are authorised to act against disobedience in their families "with the hand", they cannot carry out *hudud* (Islamic penal code)

on their families for consuming liquor, because only the rulers of the state have the authority to do that, via the judiciary system.

In social life, offences related to nightclubs and brothels are handled by its *Ulil Amri*, that is, the rulers responsible for the society.

For those not in positions of authority, the means that they are allowed to use in preventing *munkar* is to speak against it, and through *amar ma'aruf* (enjoining good) and *nahi munkar* (forbidding evil), as well as effective counsel. The means do not include aggression.

A concrete action "with the hand" may only be carried out if they have a specific authority, such as arranging for more acceptable jobs for those who work in nightclubs or brothels.

If the *Ulil Amri* do not play their part based on the authority they have, and ne-

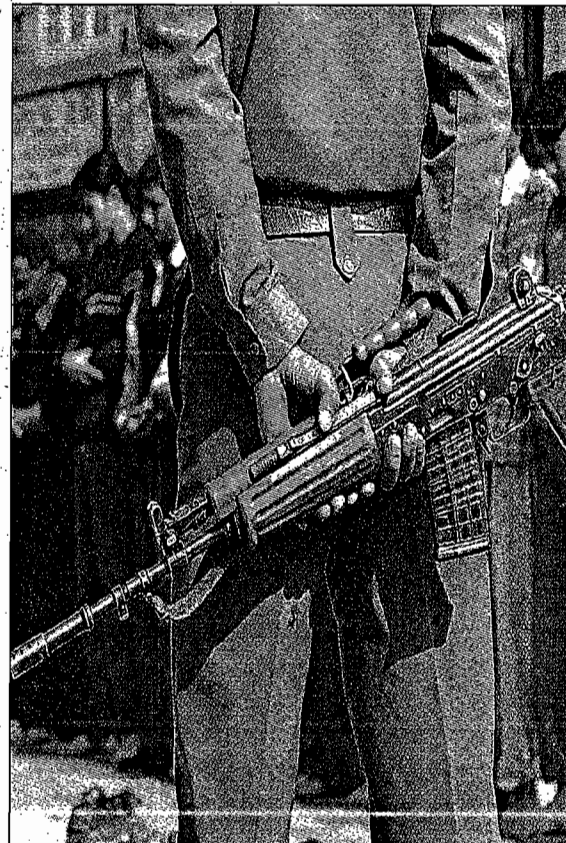


PHOTO: REUTERS

NOT CONDONED: Aggressive acts are not consistent with the gentle propagation of Islamic principles as commanded by Islam.

glect efforts to overcome *munkar* in society, then individuals and Islamic groups do not have a choice but to commit to preventive efforts by speaking out, and they must work within those limitations.

After all, preventing *munkar* is only obligatory according to one's capacity and ability. This is stated in the Quran: "On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear."

Islamic jurisprudence scholar Abdul Karim Zaidan wrote in his oft-cited *Usul Ad-Da'wah* (The Principles Of Islamic Propagation): "If the *Ulil Amri* that we mentioned do not carry out this duty, then it may be *mubah* (permissible) or obligatory for Muslims to carry out *ihtisab* (corrective action), by preparing *muhtasib* (correction officers) and sponsoring them to carry out their duties, which is limited only to

reminding and showing the way, without the use of violence, so that it will not cause havoc or trouble, and so that people may not take the opportunity to smear *hisbah* (corrective measure) and the *muhtasib* (correction officers) and cause action to be taken by the government against the *muhtasib* (correction officers)."

An aggressive act would not be consistent with the objectives of doing *da'wah* (Islamic propagation) gently as commanded by Islam.

To sum up: Islam teaches that efforts to enjoin good and forbid evil must observe three precepts.

- » Harm is avoided according to one's capacity to do so.
- » Eliminating evil should not cause a worse evil.
- » Evil cannot be eliminated with similar evil.

Given these principles in countering *munkar*, unilateral actions by Islamic vigilantes cannot be condoned. There is no reason for Muslims to ape such behaviour.

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